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ILWU: Regroup for Battles Ahead Against C&H

ILWU warehouse workers at C&H Crockett are back on the job after the declaration of a 60-day "cooling off" period. With no strike pay coming in and C&H Sugar gunning for benefits Local 6 members have relied on for years, many felt some relief that at least they would be covered for these two months by the terms of their old contract. But there should be no illusions that the C&H bosses are going to back down. And there can be no confidence that the ILWU tops, who keep pulling back from the fight, will do what is necessary to win. ***ILWU members must use this time to rearm and regroup their forces for the coming battles.***

The whole West Coast knows that if the battle at C&H isn't won, next up is the longshore core of the union, whose contract with the PMA expires in 2028. The union is being tested to see if it will defend itself. On July 21, longshore workers shut down ports across Northern California and came out to reinforce the Crockett picket lines, finally bringing out the numbers to shut down C&H's operations. Yet the ILWU leadership told their members to stand down and go back to work for the evening shift. For all the publicity, C&H was shut down for barely 24 hours. That is the hard truth.

For the rest of the six-week strike, Local 10 members were told to go to Crockett to man the straggly picket lines maintained by the ILWU bureaucracy who told picketers they could do nothing more than slightly delay C&H's operations. This policy demoralized members and frittered away their resolve to fight. Meanwhile, ASR–the giant sugar monopoly that owns C&H–was spending millions to hire scabs as well as private vans and security guards to escort them across the picket lines. The benefits C&H is trying to force Local 6 workers into giving up cost peanuts by comparison.

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Spartacist League/U.S., section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist)
Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116 • (212) 732-7860 • iclfi.org • vanguard@tiac.net • @WorkersVanguard

Chicago: (312) 563-0441
chicagospartacist@sbcglobal.net

Los Angeles: (213) 380-8239
slsycla@sbcglobal.net

New York: (212) 267-1025
nysl@tiac.net

Oakland: (510) 839-0851
slbayarea@fastmail.net

Less than a week after the July 21 action, the ILWU tops announced a “reset” in the C&H negotiations. But this “reset” didn’t require C&H to rehire the three Local 6 members fired for their actions on the picket line, leaving their cases to be resolved by the grievance procedure. Nor did C&H agree to press the sheriff’s department to drop the charges against ten ILWU Local 10 members and other strike supporters for defending themselves against scabs trying to bust through their picket lines on July 21. The “cooling off” period is not a reset, but an unnecessary retreat by the ILWU tops.

Those ILWU members who want to defend the ILWU and win at C&H need to organize themselves to fight for what it will take to win. This includes:

- Defending victimized strikers and all those facing charges.
- Rallying ILWU longshore members to prepare to mobilize their forces on the lines like they did on July 21 to shut C&H operations down tight!
- Convincing Sugar Workers Union members to defy their strikebreaking union leadership. C&H has threatened to fire any sugar worker honoring the ILWU lines. Let the SWU workers know that the ILWU will have their backs and that any agreement they reach would include the rehiring of sugar workers fired for honoring the picket lines.
- Getting other unions throughout the area to stand with the ILWU and mobilize their members on the picket lines. The Crockett workers are far from the only ones lined up in the bosses’ sights. Just look at the Marathon refinery, where the bosses have locked striking workers out of their jobs.
- Building on the support of Filipino and other organizations that have come out to back up the C&H strikers. Local 10 unanimously passed a motion at its July meeting to support the struggle for justice for the Negros 19. The allies of U.S. workers are the oppressed masses around the world who are being ground under heel by the rulers of this country and their local henchmen. And the best allies of the workers and peasants of the Philippines and across the world are the workers of this country, who are being squeezed to foot the bill for the U.S. rulers’ global marauding.

Community support has been crucial in this battle. But it cannot substitute for the ILWU’s social power and organization. The fight to change course has to be within the ILWU itself. There is no time to lose.

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